

NCAA Division I Announces Landmark Changes To Governance Structure

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The NCAA Division I Board of Directors has voted 16-2 to adopt landmark revisions to its governance structure. The Board's decision will provide limited autonomy for the 65 "Big 5" institutions in the Atlantic Coast, Big 12, Big 10, Pac-12 and the Southeastern athletic conferences. These conferences are expected to submit new rules by October 1 for consideration at the 2015 NCAA Convention held in January. While the proposal is not yet determined, the top priority likely will be raising the scholarship amount from the cost of tuition and fees, room, board and required course-related books to the "full cost of attendance," which accounts for other factors specific to each university and is generally a few thousand dollars higher than the current scholarship.

The Board's decision is subject to a 60-day comment period. If 75 universities express disapproval during this period, the board will reconsider its decision at its next scheduled meeting on October 30. If 125 universities object, implementation will be suspended pending reconsideration. If the board subsequently reaffirms its decision, all Division I universities will vote, with a five-eighths majority required to overturn. However, an override is not expected.

The change in governance structure also increases the number of Board members from 18 to 24. In addition to university presidents and chancellors, the Board now will have an athletic director, student athlete and a senior woman athletics administrator. Any other Division I conference or university (pending its conference's approval) may opt into the Big 5's rules.

The change also disbanded the longstanding Leadership and Legislative councils. Now there is one Council with 32 conference athletics directors, two student athletes, four conference commissioners and two faculty athletics representatives. The Council will make the day-to-day policy and legislative decisions for Division I. The Council governance process will be streamlined and simplified as well: Rules can be adopted in April only, instead of April and January. Any rules adopted by the Council will be subject to Board review.

The Big 5 also announced how it intends to govern its autonomy. Each of the 65 schools will receive one vote. In addition, each of the five conferences will have three student-athlete representatives, with one vote each. To get items approved, there can either be 60% in favor (48 of 80 votes) and a simple majority support from 3 of 5 conferences – or – there can be 51% in favor (41 of 80) and support from 4 of the 5 conferences.

Many of the rules, including most regarding academic requirements and amateur status, will continue to apply uniformly throughout Division I's conferences. All of Division I schools will have access to revenue-sharing and eligibility for championships.

Many questions remain unanswered, however. For example, how will institutions apply the full cost of attendance and will a disparity among schools result in potential violations? How will the full cost of attendance be reconciled with Title IX? Will the adoption of full cost of attendance apply solely to full scholarship recipients or will it result in increases for partial scholarships also? We will report additional updates as they become available.

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